

REMARKS

Claims 1-15, 17-28, and 31-49 are pending as of the mailing date of this communication that is in response to the Office Action mailed November 21, 2007. In the November 21, 2007 Office Action, the Examiner states that applicants' September 14, 2007 communication was not fully responsive to the Office Action mailed April 13, 2007. Specifically, the Examiner has stated that the applicants have failed to present arguments with respect to newly presented claims 34-49. Applicants believe that the arguments were presented, and they are highlighted in bold and italic below which were set forth in the previous communication. In this communication, applicants repeat the arguments presented in the September 14, 2007 communication and, in addition, present arguments directed to specific claims (including dependent claims 34-49). Favorable reconsideration is respectfully requested in view of the above amendments and the following remarks.

A. Previously Submitted Arguments:

As a preliminary matter, applicants assume that the reference to previously cited prior art "Berg" (U.S. Patent No. 5,999,911 to Berg et al.) in paragraph 15 of the Office action is a typographical error and that it should be "Homs" (U.S. Patent No. 7,065,493 to Homs). This belief is based on the fact that paragraph 10 of the Office action indicates that claims 20-25 and 28 are rejected as anticipated by the Homs reference. This belief is also based on the fact that paragraph 40 of the Office action indicates that the grounds of rejection are new.

Claims 1-14 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. Sec. 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite for failing to particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter which applicants regard as the invention. Applicants have amended claim 1 so that it should no longer be objectionable. Although one preferred embodiment of the invention uses a thin client application to perform step (b) and/or other steps set forth in claim 1, and applicants believe that the use of a thin client application to perform step (b) and/or other steps set forth in claim 1 would not be anticipated by or obvious over the known prior art alone or in combination, applicants believe that additional claimed features make the claims allowable as set forth below and, therefore, do not want to limit the performance of step (b) to being performed only by a thin client application.

Claims 20-25 and 28 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. Sec. 102(e) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 7,065,493 to Homs, hereinafter referred to as the "Homs reference." Claims 1, 2, 4, 5, 7-19, 26, 27, and 31-33 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. Sec. 103 as being unpatentable over the Homs reference in view of U.S. Patent Application No. 2003/0225663 A1 to Horan et al., hereinafter referred to as the "Horan reference." Claims 3 and 6 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. Sec. 103 as being unpatentable over the Homs reference and the Horan reference, in view of what the Examiner claims was well known prior art at the time of the applicants' invention.

Applicants have amended claims to clarify the invention. Applicants have made these amendments for the purpose of furthering prosecution, but reserve the right to file continuation applications. For the purpose of furthering prosecution, applicants would be pleased to work with the Examiner to amend the currently pending claims so that they would be allowable or to draft new claims that would be allowable.

The pending claims are directed to methods, systems, and apparatuses for creating a workflow process. As described in previous communications, the methods, systems, and apparatuses feature a centralized system that users access. The methods, systems, and apparatuses allow users, some of whom have no previous computer programming or computer developing skills, to create a custom workflow process. In some preferred embodiments, the methods, systems, and apparatuses allow access to a centralized master center via a thin client application or via web services. In some preferred embodiments, the methods, systems, and apparatuses do not require users to have specialized hardware or software to participate in the creation of the workflow.

The independent claims have been amended to clarify the action objects are defined to have at least one property including at least one form related function for processing said at least one form. Support for this claim language may be found, for example, in the original specification beginning at page 15, line 15: "In defining the properties of the action object icon 455, the system analyst 40 may define form related functions to the action object icon 455." *New dependent claims have also been added that specify exemplary form related functions. Support for these new dependent claims may be found, for example, in the original specification beginning at page 15, line 16:*

“Form related functions may include, but are not limited to: (i) instructing the action object icon 455 to save data entered into the form 445 in the database server 140, forms server 130 or user interface server 150; (ii) instructing the action object icon 455 to check for combinations of data on the form 445; (iii) initiate emails to an end user 30 based on data entered into the form 445; (iv) generate correspondence to an end user 30 based on data entered into the form 445; or (v) generate audit information.”

The amended claims, therefore, specify action objects specifically perform functions related to the forms.

Applicants would like to direct the Examiner’s attention to two of the claim elements in particular: “forms” and “action objects.”

The claimed “forms” are described in applicants’ original application. For example, beginning at page 15, line 1 “forms” are described as follows: “The forms 445 consist of previously defined data files 425 which have been formatted.” Thus, “forms” are not traditional forms (e.g. documents with blanks to be filled), but a collection of data (defined by a system analyst) that is accessible from the action objects and used to define workflow logic. This is also shown in the claims. For example, in claim 1, “forms” include “at least one data file,” “data files” include “at least one data record,” and “data records” are based on collected data. Applicants would like to mention that the Homsí reference may use the terms “form” and “document” interchangeably which complicates this analysis (although applicants are not specifically admitting this because there also appear to be differences). However, at this point it is applicants’ understanding that neither the “form” nor the “document” can be equated to applicants’ claimed “form.” As set forth above, applicants’ claimed “forms” are not traditional forms (e.g. documents with blanks to be filled), but a collection of data that is accessible from the action objects and used to define workflow logic. Applicants’ claimed “forms” include “at least one data file,” “data files” include “at least one data record,” and “data records” are based on collected data. Neither the Homsí “form” nor the Homsí “document” have this structure.

The claimed “action objects” are described in applicants’ original application. For example, “action objects” are described, for example, beginning at page 12, line 13 as follows: “The action object icons 455 represent properties that determine how a form 445 or forms 445 are

treated in a workflow process.” “Action objects” are also described, for example, beginning at page 14, line 28 as follows: “Again, the action object icons 455 represent how the form 445 is treated throughout a workflow process 10.” As can be seen from the definitions (and elsewhere in the specification and claims), action objects can be tied to or bound to data within a defined form. This allows an end user who inputs data during workflow processing to perform actions on the data and/or to control the path of the workflow. Associating the form to an action object (e.g. by using the name of the form) facilitates selection of a specific data record within the specified form from the action object.

The Homs reference does not have a concept of the interaction between the forms and the object icons as set forth in the currently pending independent claims. The Examiner appears to equate the Homs forms discussed at column 4, lines 58-66 with applicants’ claimed forms. Applicants specifically reject the proposition that they can be equated as the Homs forms are not groupings of data files (or formatted, previously defined data files). The Examiner appears to equate the Homs representations of the events and conditions with applicants’ claimed object icons. Applicants specifically reject the proposition that they can be equated. For purposes of this analysis only, however, even if the Homs forms could be equated with applicants’ claimed forms and the Homs representations of the events and conditions could be equated with applicants’ claimed object icons, there is still no teaching or suggestion in the Homs representations of the events and conditions could have defined properties, at least one of which is a form related function for processing forms. As this is an example of a claim limitation now present in applicants’ pending independent claims, applicants respectfully submit that the Homs reference does not teach or suggest the claimed invention, alone or in combination with the other references, of the independent claims or the claims depending thereon.

From applicants’ reading of the Homs reference, it appears that Homs directly associates a set of workflow with a Lotus Notes form to be completed by a user. How the Lotus Notes form is directly associated with a set of workflow appears to be shown in FIG. 4, where all workflow related to a specific event (e.g. submission of an expense report) will link to data that has been defined within the Lotus Notes form that the users see. Sub-forms can be attached to the form by the analyst, but the sub-forms (conditions and segments) only use the form data for routing

of the workflow. And, the formula is within the document being routed, such that the document would have to be evaluated to a “True” or “False” condition to be used by a conditional form.

Using applicants’ claimed invention, the organization of the data to be used by the workflow is independent of the user interface (UI) presented to the end user when filling in the data as part of the workflow step. These are the claimed “forms” of the present application. This leads to several differences between applicants’ claimed invention and the device taught in the Homs reference. Examples of the differences include the following:

1. Data defined in the form may or may not be visible to the end user, allowing internal variables to be associated with the form.
2. Any collection of “forms” can be linked to any number of workflow sequences.
3. The system analyst can build expressions in terms of form data (from any defined forms) that can be used to influence the flow of the workflow (conditional action objects), generate data outside of the workflow (e.g. save the result of a calculation to a separate database), or change the value of any form data.

If the rejections to the claims based on the Homs reference are to be maintained, applicants respectfully request that the Examiner show where each of applicants’ claim limitations can be found in the Homs reference. Applicants would be particularly interested in the Homs teaching for applicants’ claimed “forms” and “action objects.”

B. Arguments Directed to Specific Claims:

Claim 1 includes the claim elements of “forms” (that include “at least one data file,” “data files” that include “at least one data record,” and “data records” that are based on collected data), “action objects,” and interaction between the forms and action objects, and “form related functions for processing forms.” For the reasons discussed above, claims including these claim elements should be allowable over the cited art. Claims 2, 4-5, 7, 10-12, and 34-35 are dependent on claim 1 and should be allowable for the same reasons as well as for reasons relating to their specific claim elements. For example, claim 34 includes claim elements directed to a preferred embodiment of implementing the step of defining properties of at least one action object

in which at least one property includes at least one form related function for processing the form. This claim further provides a list of the form related functions from which the at least one form related function may be selected. Support for this may be found, for example, in the original specification beginning at page 15, line 16:

“Form related functions may include, but are not limited to: (i) instructing the action object icon 455 to save data entered into the form 445 in the database server 140, forms server 130 or user interface server 150; (ii) instructing the action object icon 455 to check for combinations of data on the form 445; (iii) initiate emails to an end user 30 based on data entered into the form 445; (iv) generate correspondence to an end user 30 based on data entered into the form 445; or (v) generate audit information.”

The cited references do not teach or suggest defining properties of at least one action object in which at least one property includes at least one form related function for processing the form and, therefore, do not teach or suggest the form related functions listed in this claim. Claim 35 specifies that the step of defining at least one data record based on the plurality of data uses a user interface data selection technique via a thin client application. This feature is discussed in detail in applicants' January 12, 2007 communication.

Claim 15 sets forth “defining form processing actions by setting action object icon properties for said at least two action object icons, at least one property including at least one form related function for processing at least one form consisting of previously defined data files that have been formatted.” For the reasons discussed above, this claim should be allowable over the cited art. Claims 17 and 36-37 are dependent on claim 15 and should be allowable for the same reasons as well as for reasons relating to their specific claim elements. For example, claim 36 includes claim elements similar to those found in claim 34, and claim 37 includes claim elements similar to those found in claim 35. These claims should be allowable for the same reasons as discussed above.

Claim 20 specifies “said requested workflow process containing at least two action object icons, said at least two action object icons having action object icon properties, at least one property including at least one form related function for processing at least one form consisting of previously defined data files that have been formatted.” For the reasons discussed

above, this claim should be allowable over the cited art. Further, claim 20 includes the claim element of “inputting a request to access a workflow process to a master center” that is not taught or suggested in the Homsy reference. (Applicants are specifically not admitting that the Homsy router is the claimed master center, but there is no request to access a workflow process submitted to the Homsy router.) Claims 21-22 and 38-39 are dependent on claim 20 and should be allowable for the same reasons as well as for reasons relating to their specific claim elements. For example, claim 38 includes claim elements similar to those found in claim 34, and claim 39 includes claim elements similar to those found in claim 35. These claims should be allowable for the same reasons as discussed above.

Like claim 1, claim 26 includes the claim elements of “forms” (that include “at least one data file,” “data files” that include “at least one data record,” and “data records” that are based on collected data), “action objects,” and interaction between the forms and action objects, and “form related functions for processing forms.” For the reasons discussed above, claims including these claim elements should be allowable over the cited art. Claims 40-41 are dependent on claim 26 and should be allowable for the same reasons as well as for reasons relating to their specific claim elements. For example, claim 40 includes claim elements similar to those found in claim 34, and claim 41 includes claim elements similar to those found in claim 35. These claims should be allowable for the same reasons as discussed above.

Claim 27 specifies “means for defining properties” for the action object icons, “at least one property including at least one form related function for processing at least one form consisting of previously defined data files that have been formatted.” For the reasons discussed above, this claim should be allowable over the cited art. Claims 42-43 are dependent on claim 27 and should be allowable for the same reasons as well as for reasons relating to their specific claim elements. For example, claim 42 includes claim elements similar to those found in claim 34, and claim 43 includes claim elements similar to those found in claim 35. These claims should be allowable for the same reasons as discussed above.

Claim 28 specifies the “at least two action objects having action object properties, at least one property including at least one form related function for processing at least one form consisting of previously defined data files that have been formatted.” For the reasons discussed above, this claim should be allowable over the cited art. Further, like claim 20, claim 28 includes

the claim element of “means for inputting a request to access a workflow process to a master center” that is not taught or suggested in the Homsy reference. (Applicants are specifically not admitting that the Homsy router is the claimed master center, but there is no request to access a workflow process submitted to the Homsy router.) Claims 44-45 are dependent on claim 28 and should be allowable for the same reasons as well as for reasons relating to their specific claim elements. For example, claim 44 includes claim elements similar to those found in claim 34, and claim 45 includes claim elements similar to those found in claim 35. These claims should be allowable for the same reasons as discussed above.

Like claim 1, claim 31 includes the claim elements of “forms” (that include “at least one data file,” “data files” that include “at least one data record,” and “data records” that are based on collected data), “action objects,” and interaction between the forms and action objects, and “form related functions for processing forms.” For the reasons discussed above, claims including these claim elements should be allowable over the cited art. Claims 46-47 are dependent on claim 31 and should be allowable for the same reasons as well as for reasons relating to their specific claim elements. For example, claim 46 includes claim elements similar to those found in claim 34, and claim 47 includes claim elements similar to those found in claim 35. These claims should be allowable for the same reasons as discussed above.

Like claim 1, claim 32 includes the claim elements of “forms” (that include “at least one data file,” “data files” that include “at least one data record,” and “data records” that are based on collected data), “action objects,” and interaction between the forms and action objects, and “form related functions for processing forms.” For the reasons discussed above, this claim should be allowable over the cited art. Claims 33 and 48-49 are dependent on claim 32 and should be allowable for the same reasons as well as for reasons relating to their specific claim elements. For example, claim 48 includes claim elements similar to those found in claim 34, and claim 49 includes claim elements similar to those found in claim 35. These claims should be allowable for the same reasons as discussed above.

Applicants have chosen not to present arguments specific to each of the pending claims, but reserve the right to present such arguments in future communications.


Based on the amendments and remarks set forth herein, applicants respectfully submit that the pending claims are now in condition for allowance.

CONCLUSION

Reconsideration of the claims is respectfully requested in view of the above amendments and remarks. In the event that there are any questions concerning this response, or the application in general, the Examiner is respectfully urged to telephone the undersigned attorney so that prosecution of the application may be expedited.

Please charge Deposit Account No. 13-3571 for any additional fees which may be required.

Respectfully submitted,



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